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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 000954

SIPDIS

BRUSSELS FOR HINSON-JONES  
NSC FOR FRAZER AND BYRNE  
OSD FOR IKINS AND PDAS-D MCCONNELL  
BANJUL FOR DCM

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SUBJECT: POST OFR ROUND-TABLE MEETING WITH NSA MOHAMMED

REF: ABUJA 873

(U) Classified by Ambassador Howard F. Jeter for reasons 1.5  
(b) and (d).

1. (C) SUMMARY. During an April 19 post-Operation FOCUS RELIEF (OFR) round-table meeting, Nigeria's National Security Advisor told us that the Nigerian civilian government has complete control of the military. The NSA was pleased that the OFR meeting had been positive, but deep frustration that the MPRI payment had not been made (as he had been assured by MOD and other officials). General Mohammed also supported the notion of using retired Nigerian military officials for counterparts in the MPRI program. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) Following the OFR Roundtable, Ambassador Jeter, DOD PDAS McConnell, AF PDAS Mark Bellamy, DATT, and Counselor for Regional Affairs called on National Security Advisor General Aliyu Mohammed (ret). The NSA was joined by his principal assistant, LTC M.I. Idris.

3. (C) McConnell briefed the NSA on the results of the OFR round-table. McConnell said that MOD officials had agreed that Operation FOCUS RELIEF Phase III (OFR P3) personnel would be billeted inside the perimeter of Nigerian bases, but would not be co-located in Nigerian barracks. The specific bases were not yet identified. (COMMENT: As noted reftel, the Chief of Army Staff has committed to a site inspection by Nigerian Army personnel and the DATT on April 25. Embassy is cautiously optimistic that the basing issue will be resolved favorably. END COMMENT.) MOD officials had also agreed that Nigerian forces would deploy to Sierra Leone for one year. DATT then briefed the NSA on which Nigerian elements and locations had previously been identified for P3 training. He also noted that in order for OFR P3 to begin on time it was necessary for the MOD to confirm the military units selected for the training.

4. (C) The Ambassador advised the NSA that a meeting on the edges of the round-table with Nigerian Chief of Army Staff LtGen Victor Malu had gone extremely well. Malu had told the U.S. side that he was not opposed to OFR and his positive attitude towards the program had been misrepresented in the media. The U.S. side had expressed its continuing high regard for Malu and assured him that articles critical of him on the Internet and in the American print media did not represent U.S. views.

5. (C) McConnell advised the NSA of the continuing hope that Malu would accept the standing invitation to visit the U.S. to meet with senior U.S. defense officials to discuss OFR and other matters of mutual interest. Finally, McConnell reminded the NSA that the U.S. has yet to receive Nigeria's USD 3.5 million for the MPRI program.

6. (C) The NSA responded that the Nigerian government remained firmly committed to OFR and that Nigerian elected officials were completely in charge of the military. He said that he was pleased that the Roundtable had gone well, but expressed surprise and frustration over the MPRI payment not being received. General Mohammed said that he had been assured by senior Ministry of Finance officials that the payment had already been made. He again requested that the U.S. Treasury account number where the MPRI payment would be received be passed directly to him. The NSA said he would personally carry the account number to President Obasanjo to have the President sign the order to the Nigerian Central Bank to make immediate payment.

17. (C) COMMENT: Later that day, the NSA's office passed the Embassy copies of the Nigerian MOD documents which transferred the MPRI payment funds from the MOD to the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN). The documents were dated April 18 and 19, which suggest that MOD personnel handling the transfer of funds had been misleading the NSA for several months concerning their delay in making the payments, or that the Ministry of Finance had delayed the release of the funds to the MOD. In any case, the last step is for the CBN to transfer the funds to the U.S. Treasury account. Embassy hopes this issue has now been put to rest. END COMMENT.

18. (C) In further discussions concerning MPRI, McConnell and the Ambassador noted that the U.S. has proposed to the MOD using retired Nigerian military personnel as counter-parts. This solution might make it easier for the Nigerian side to ensure regular and reliable participation in the program. NSA Mohammed said he thought this was an excellent idea, and said that he knew several retired generals who would be good for the program. He named retired Generals Archibong and Jaffar Isa, both of whom were also strong supporters of OFR.

19. (C) The meeting concluded with Ambassador Jeter noting that the discussion during the roundtable had been frank and productive, giving hope that both programs could now move forward expeditiously. While other issues would certainly arise, they could be handled in a collaborative way. The NSA agreed that this was now the case.

110. (C) COMMENT: As noted reftel, there are still hurdles to overcome before we can be confident that OFR3 will begin on time in Nigeria. However, after an open and productive roundtable, and a clear message of support from the NSA, Embassy is hopeful that the Nigerian defense establishment is now ready to move forward productively. The retirement/dismissal of General Malu and his cohorts should now pave the way. END COMMENT.  
Jeter